DTSC Mercury Elimination Program (HELP)

Kaiser Permanente facilities receiving the commendations were:

- Baldwin Park
- Bellflower
- Fremont
- South Bay (Harbor City)
- Hayward
- Los Angeles (Sunset)
- West Los Angeles
- Oakland
- Panorama City
- Redwood City
- Richmond
- Riverside
- Sacramento
- South Sacramento
- San Diego
- San Francisco
- Santa Teresa (San Jose)
- San Rafael
- Santa Clara
- South San Francisco
- Vallejo
- Walnut Creek

Pollution Prevention

SUCCESS STORY, September 2006

Kaiser Permanente

On June 24, 1998, the American Hospital Association (AHA) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) began a landmark agreement identifying goals to reduce the impact of healthcare wastes on the environment. One goal, the virtual elimination of mercury-containing waste from hospitals nationwide by 2005, became California's SB 1916 voluntary challenge project.

To assist in the effort to eliminate mercury from medical facilities, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) developed the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP). Through this program, DTSC trained hospitals in mercury elimination and gave awards to mercury-free hospitals, newly built mercury-free hospitals, and corporations achieving an overall removal rate of 75 percent.

Twenty-two individual Kaiser Permanente California hospitals participated in the program and received certification. Kaiser Permanente reduced the level of mercury usage at its California medical facilities by 87 percent on average. Some Kaiser hospitals in the State have achieved a 99 percent elimination of mercury products in addition to four recently constructed Kaiser Permanente facilities built virtually mercury-free.

Mercury is a reproductive toxin and a potent neurotoxin. When hospitals throw away mercury-containing devices such as fever thermometers, blood pressure measuring devices, and other mercury-containing products, the chemical can reenter the environment. According to the U.S. EPA, medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest source of mercury reentering the environment. In addition, it estimates that mercury fever thermometers contribute about 17 tons of mercury disposed of in solid waste landfills annually.